

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF WASHINGTON AS A NATIONAL CAPITAL

By BERNARD R. GREEN

Probably nothing is more generally conceded by thoughtful people than the proposition that the cities and surroundings of a population should be as beautiful and ennobling as possible. Most of the older cities grew without plan or much thought of the future. The consequences that many desired subsequent improvements were rendered either impossible or burdensome, expensive, and generally but partially practicable at any cost.

Narrow and crooked streets, devoid of good vistas or symmetry, air at light, with awkward grades, and buildings of all heights and all imaginable and unimaginable materials and designs, have been unrestricted except with the business sagacity to see that beautiful things are more valuable than the commonplace or ugly—have caused streets to be beautifully laid out and built up.

## Foresight and Good Advice.

Why should not the people, as a body politic, through its own self-government, do the same thing for the general good? A little foresight and good advice, obtainable at very little expense, would save the case if the majority of the people would stop to think about it. Undertakings of this character are neither difficult nor embarrassing to undertake, generation for posterity could be left to do its full share, while every move would be a material present improvement proportionately valuable and enjoyable.

No grand general plan for a prospective large city can be executed within any few years, nor even within any one generation. The rapidity of development must depend on that of the growth of the city.

Therefore, a general plan and set of fundamental principles should be adopted as early as possible, and thereafter jealously guarded by a competent advisory office or commission to see, whenever any new building or other improvement is undertaken, that it conforms to the prescribed plan.

Thus may even the present generation enjoy and profit by the growing beauty and attractiveness of the city, and at the same time leave to its successors an easier opportunity instead of a blockade of continuous development in the same direction. If we start it wisely it will surely grow with geometrical progression, because each added item of real beauty will increase the beautiful effect and beget improvement by multiplication instead of addition.

Happily, however, a new era has already dawned and become well established in the country, and the larger cities are fast lining up in thoughtful and intelligent consideration of the subject. They are especially recognizing the value of directing civic operations as much as possible along artistic lines, and that it pays, for the city thus becomes more attractive, populous, and rich.

## Beautiful Boston.

Boston took up the subject with characteristic vigor and good taste years ago, and made itself, with its suburbs, the most beautiful and attractive of any city in the country, expending \$20,000,000 in parks, boulevards, and landscape treatment, interspersed with more than two hundred square miles of territory and costing half a million dollars annually for maintenance.

New York, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, with its already extensive boulevards and parks; Minneapolis and St. Paul combined; St. Louis, Kansas City, and New Orleans have all taken the matter in hand in recent years and established their civic art commissions. Most of them have already made such remarkable progress that the improvements are their most interesting features.

The subject is not now a new one, and the development of Washington as the National Capital, lately brought to the front more prominently than ever before, by an accelerated growth of population and of Government interests, presents nothing strange nor difficult of realization. Unlike Europe, with

autocratic authority to push such undertakings in the past centuries, we have had to await public enlightenment and appreciation before we could begin.

Most fortunately, however, the fathers of the Republic, in their marvelous wisdom and foresight, did succeed in securing the adoption, by the Government, of a plan of avenues, streets and park reservations before the Government had even occupied its District of Columbia, and had even begun the construction of a single public building. That plan, all drawn on a single sheet of paper, guided down the century the layout of the entire city and finally fixed its lines and spaces forever beyond alteration, and the venerable old plan itself, worthily revered somewhat like the Constitution, is tenderly preserved among the most precious archives of the United States.

## Immediate Action Necessary.

Thus was secured to the nation and to all its future generations, practically without cost, the opportunity for the gradual building up in architecture, sculpture and landscape, of a capital city worthy of the great nation it represents, and, in the best sense of the term, the most beautiful city the world has ever known. To ensure this, however, a plan of development along the lines of the old city plan must be immediately adopted.

Up to the present point the city has grown well in its years of slow increase of population and government needs. A most fortunate beginning was made in the architecture and location of the first of the Government buildings and in conformity with the original plan of the city. Then followed a long period of dark age of architecture throughout the country, during which the fortunately few public buildings erected in Washington were designed and located in a disorderly and thoughtless fashion.

Many millions of dollars were thus expended and we now have the permanent granite wood-pile of the State, War and Navy building, and the ill-favored and ill-located Postoffice and Pension buildings. These are useful as bad examples, for such seem necessary in teaching what good architecture is.

By good fortune, however, hardly to be expected and certainly not to be relied on, the public spirited unofficial efforts of a few individuals have resulted in the appropriate designs and locations of the six great public buildings, including the Union Railway Station now under construction in the city. The comprehensive study of the subject, embodied in the plans of the Senate Park Commission, although unofficial and still resting in the form of a report to the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, was the moving spirit in this, and powerfully illustrates the indispensability of adopting and prescribing a general plan and certain fundamental principles for the future growth of both the city and the District.

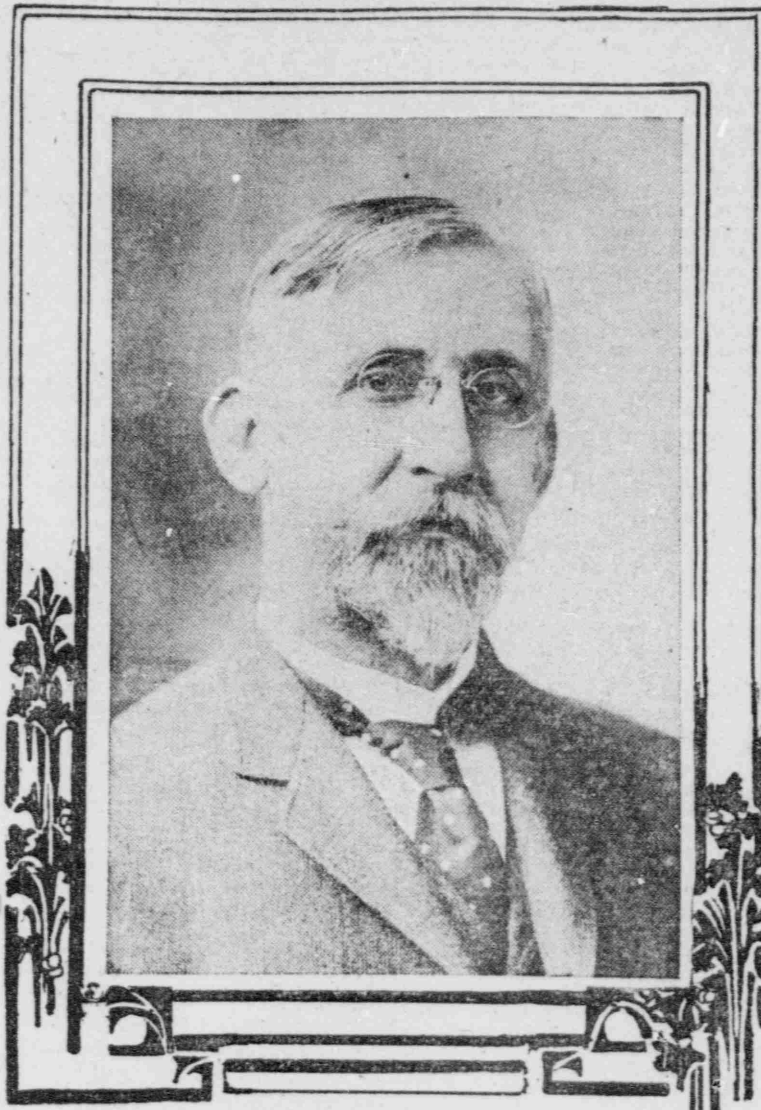
The United States owns and controls the District, the ground acquired when the Government was organized. For its own independent and superior business. This control is absolute and as permanent as the Government itself.

The owner, "Uncle Sam," will always live to use and enjoy the location while the generations of the people will come and go, each enjoying it for a brief period—a mere fraction of the need for its full development—the growth of oak trees and noble groves, the permanent setting of fine lawns, the ageing of graceful classic buildings—things which the passing generations may successfully enjoy and contribute to the development of.

## Precaution Is Advised.

But every step taken without the adoption of a plan looking to the future will surely be regretted later on. Just as the fathers of the Republic planned the national city, forseeing the wonderful increase that has come to the nation, the present fathers of the yet greater and ever greater nation of the future should at once take the few simple and inexpensive steps to ensure to the coming generations opportunities to add their contribution with telling effect to the beautiful upbuilding of the city and District. Instead of allowing those opportunities to be destroyed forever.

All this would be accomplished at no



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expense beyond what the government will incur in any event. Intelligent, artistic direction of the inevitable expenditures for public buildings and improvements is all that is required, not an effort to hasten the development or the expenditures. It costs no more to secure good designs and good results in architecture and landscape than inferior ones. It depends mainly on the brains and taste employed, for the professional fees are practically uniform.

The desired object can be attained and the beginnings immediately realized if Congress will simply authorize the President to appoint a commission merely to advise Congress and the Executive in all matters relating in any way to the artistic building up of the city of Washington and the District of Columbia. Such a commission, well chosen, would very soon win the confidence of all parties concerned and convince them of the wisdom and feasibility of its propositions.

If not, Congress could terminate it at any time, because always in control of the situation, and never obliged to appropriate money, or enter into any obligation for the execution of a single plan or idea discordant with its judgment.

## To Point the Way.

The commission's business would never be to urge rapid progress of development nor the expenditure of money, but only

to point the way, having always an eye to a predetermined, comprehensive scheme whenever an item within its scope may be under consideration.

An instance in point is the recently published revival of the memorial bridge project. Such an important and dominating object should by all means be considered with reference to the general development of the whole public territory extending to the Capitol and up and down the Potomac shore, and not to the merely local features of the old observatory hill and a New York avenue approach, as if it could never come into relation with anything else in the wide range of the Government's own permanent territory all about it.

Such a relation is soon to come and to count for greatness or meanness according to the quality of the consideration given to its conception and design.

All permanent work done in the public reservations and parks, not to speak of the city at large, should be considered directly in the line of the gradual execution of a prescribed general plan. Artistic foresight in all such undertakings would thus be an investment of incalculable future value to all the people and of the greatest interest even during the gradual development of the general plan.

Every added step would inspire further progress at a compounding rate,

and the city very soon become famous throughout the world as the subject of the nation's serious aesthetic attention, while its attractiveness to the visitor and the home seeker would be correspondingly increased.

The advisory commission would not depend on its own personal ideas and resources in the performance of its great duty, but would gather and be the conservator of the best intelligence and taste of the whole country. The nation rather than a committee alone would thus control its own Capital City, as it should do.

Individuals and corporations employ expert advisers in their important and more comprehensive affairs. Why should not the Government do likewise and be as thoughtful of the future of its city as an individual of his estate?

## Congress Confused.

Congress has been beset and confused, time and again, with ill-studied projects for Government buildings and similar works involving good taste and proper location, all well meant, but, in the nature of things, considered within narrow limits and without reference to the future in all its bearings. The District interests themselves are constantly coming before Congress under similar conditions—incomplete and out of relation to the interests of the National Government in the matter of general development.

Thus it happened that, in self defense, the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia solicited the advice of a number of the best qualified professional men in the country, resulting in the great report of the so-called Senate Park Commission, three years ago. That report is illustrated by a most complete series of large drawings and models by which every person may get a clear idea of the beautiful project represented as it would work out in part and in whole.

The work of the commission was gratuitous, although it comprised a year and a half of incessant labor of the commissioners. The project is as simple, direct and restrained in its composition and detail as it is marvellously grand in its effects, illustrating conspicuously the greatness of true simplicity in such art. None of the buildings need be highly enriched or expensively designed, for their style would be harmonious with the classic style of the Capitol and several of the Government buildings already and now being erected in the city.

Considering its general scope and fundamental principles, the Park Commission's plan cannot be extensively criticized. Something different may be made, but not, in the main, better. Its very basis is faithfulness to the original L'Enfant plan of the city, conceded by all good judges to be beyond criticism, and on which the city has grown for a century.

## The Desirable End.

Such is the all desirable end to be secured for the growth of the sections occupied and to be occupied by the Government itself. But the privately occupied sections of the city should also be considered and directed in their improvement along lines and under regulations ensuring harmony within themselves and with the Government sections. This would make directly for the good of all concerned until the whole territory, becoming thus the embodiment of the nation's best taste as well as the seat of its great Government, would be by far the

most distinguished metropolises in the world.

At present the District building regulations have hardly reached the subject of fine art, and any lot owner may still freely build as ugly and discordant a structure as may suit his fancy or his spite, doing his neighbors as well as the public in general the injury of a visual nuisance. So long as his building be strong enough, safe from fire, not too high nor beyond the building line, no restriction is made nor guide indicated.

The house may be of any color or color and any shape or style, or no style at all, wholly regardless of its neighborhood. Other nuisances are proscribed, but not this one. Consequently no city as a whole can be said to be well built. Certain squares and sections of cities are so, but not the whole.

Not rare uniformly but harmony is the thing. People have been so long familiar with the existing practice as to be oblivious of the advantage and practicability of a certain degree of prescribed and enforced good taste in the building up of their cities. Restrictions well considered and obeyed would really harm or inconvenience nobody, while, on the contrary, all would profit in the long run.

## Proposed Commission.

The proposed commission would have the respect and confidence of the citizens as well as of the Government, because composed of the ablest men in the profession in the country at large, free from local prejudice and selfish interest. It would be available for advice to the citizens one and all as well as the District Government on matters of good taste in their building and parking enterprises.

Few builders or architects would wish to go counter to the best judgment of such a commission, especially as to the principles of civic design. All earnest and thoughtful people with limited training in art wish to know the way from the bad which spending their money in that direction and in Washington would welcome such a source of advice.

Positive steps to guard and wisely direct the beautification of the city and District must be taken very soon. No other course may ensure even passing results of the inevitable future expenditure of the nation's money in its Capital City.

## A GREELEY ANECDOTE.

A friend of Dr. White says he missed the point of one of the best and gives it in this way: "A brother Universalist having called to remonstrate with Horace Greeley on the omission of the Tribune to convert those orthodox Christians who were filling the religious press of New York with revivalist sermons denouncing damnation to all but the elect, found the great editor busy writing. He kept on writing while the caller said: 'Mr. Greeley, do you mean to let those awful doctrine go unchallenged in your newspaper? that all but a few of the people of this great country are going to hell—is that your idea of duty?' Finally Greeley's patience was exhausted; he lifted up his voice and spoke: 'Not half enough people go to hell now; go there yourself.'"

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The firm was incorporated November 2, 1895, under the laws of the District, and the officers are J. A. Kellier, president; E. J. Murphy, vice president and general manager; E. R. S. Embrey, secretary and treasurer.

The firm believes in good, honest, artistic work. Cheap labor cannot produce this so they do not employ it. Although the firm only commenced business about two years ago, mention of a few residences, which have received its work and where it has met with the highest approval, will suffice to show its standing. Among the many



are the Champlain apartment house, residence of R. F. Bishop, at Falls Church; F. T. Sumner, Charles A. Douglas, the prominent attorney; Mrs. May's fine residence on Columbia road and Quincy place; Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Kingman, Mrs. Admiral Taylor, W. C. Ford, and Mr. Henry Mueller. The last five elegant residences being located in the beautiful suburb of Chevy Chase. There are also the fine homes of Mr. Sharp, Cleveland Park; Hon. J. B. Henderson, Sixteenth and Erie, and a long list of others. The firm's interior glass work in the American Security and Trust Co., Fifteenth and New York avenue, was also executed by the Murphy company.

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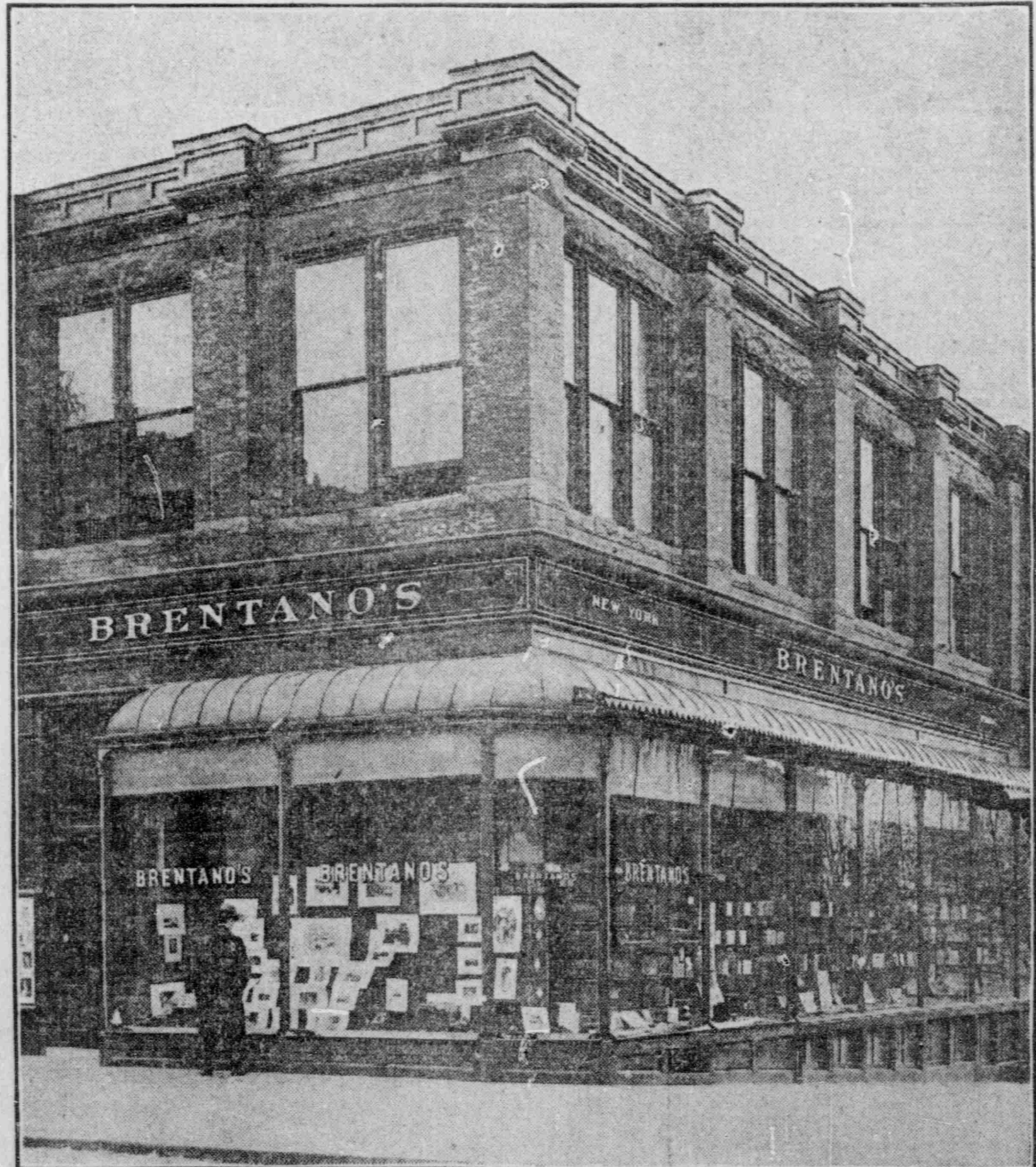
There is no doubt in the minds of real estate experts who are closely watching the wonderful development of Washington that this will eventually be the most desirable residence section of the National Capital—not only because of its proximity to the Rock Creek National Park—one of the most beautiful reservations in the world—but on account of the high elevation of the land and its desirability from the standpoint of health.

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